



**King County Mental Health Chemical Abuse and Dependency Services Division
2002 Briefing Paper**

FUND A SUBSTANCE ABUSE PREVALENCE STUDY

BACKGROUND:

Our current prevalence information dates to the Washington Household Survey, completed in 1994, and was updated with new population estimates in 1998. This information was completed before the methamphetamine crisis, during significant demographic changes in areas such as Clark County, King County and Snohomish Counties, and without addressing the differences between rural, suburban and urban populations. To effectively focus resources to address the problem of substance abuse and dependency in our communities, we need accurate and current data that describes prevalence within each county.

ISSUES/CHALLENGES:

“Sometimes the most important decisions we make are the ones we discuss the least. This is certainly true of the way we decide who is eligible for government-paid human services. Eligibility for these services is often shrouded in complex rules that vary widely from one program to another. Most programs have eligibility rules based on income and are provided only for the poor. But how poor is poor enough? When should people participate, through co-payments, in financing the services they receive? At what income level should people go it alone? Are there services that should be provided without regard to income?”¹

As we make decisions about who is poor enough to be eligible for publicly paid treatment, we need to recognize that the prevalence of treatment need varies throughout the state, and is very different within each county. As the Department of Social and Health Services and the State Legislature struggle with defining the eligible populations for public services, three additional questions need current answers:

- ❖ Where in Washington State are the needs for treatment greatest?
- ❖ Which populations should be eligible for that treatment in order to recoup the greatest benefits to public safety and public health?
- ❖ Where are those eligible groups located, and in what numbers?

¹ *"Facing the Future: The State of Human Services in Washington"* is a report produced by the Department of Social and Health Services for the purpose of engaging citizens and our community partners in a conversation about government's changing role in providing health and human services. September 2002.

DATA:

Alcohol and drug abuse costs Washington State \$2.54 billion (1996) annually. Of this total, 59% is directly attributable to alcohol abuse, and 41% to drug abuse. Substance abuse is the direct cause of 2,824 deaths (1996) and untold grief and loss.

Statewide data shows that:

- ❖ 11% of adults whose income is less than 200% of the Federal Poverty Level need treatment.
- ❖ 8.67% of adolescents need treatment.
- ❖ 82% of incarcerated youth have an alcohol/drug abuse problem.
- ❖ 70% of incarcerated adults have an alcohol/drug abuse problem.
- ❖ 68% of parents/guardians of youth in out-of-home placement have an alcohol/drug abuse problem.
- ❖ 60+% of adult jail bookings test positive for alcohol/drugs in Seattle and Spokane.
- ❖ 11.1% of SSI recipients needed chemical dependency treatment.

RECOMMENDATION/LEGISLATIVE ACTION:

MHCADSD supports the prevalence study concept. The final outcomes should provide local area (county) analyses using the best estimates available. Prevalence estimates at the county level will support appropriate eligibility and funding formula decisions by the Department of Social and Health Services and its divisions while supporting local treatment and prevention systems management.